

Safety Steering Committee (SSC) Meeting

August 25, 2009

Attendance

Office of Administration (OA)	✓ Deno Verenes, Deputy Assistant Secretary ✓ Cathy Biggs-Silvers, Staff Director ✓ Laura Brown-Lucas, Staff Assistant ✓ Gerald Winston, Fire/Safety Officer, VA Central Office	Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)	✓ Frank Denny, Director ✓ Ruth Grubb, Program Analyst Luann Jenkins, Program Analyst Ernise Benjamin, Management Assistant
Veterans Canteen Service	✓ Michael Rabdau, Washington Liaison Officer	VA Austin Information Technology Center	✓ Rocco DiFronzo, Manager, Enterprise Applications
Veterans Benefits Administration	Leo Phelan, Director, Facilities, Access & Administration ✓ Beverly Young, Facilities, Access & Administration ✓ David Newman, Facilities, Access & Administration ✓ Raven Thompson, Facilities Access & Administration	Veterans Health Administration	✓ John Beatty, Director, Safety & Technical Services ✓ Marilyn Waggoner, CEOSH ✓ Dr. Michael Hodgson, Chief Consultant, Occupational Health, Safety & Prevention Strategic Healthcare Group ✓ Vernon Wilkes, Industrial Hygienist
National Cemetery Administration	Patrick Hallinan, Associate Director ✓ John Thios, Safety/Occupational Health Program Manager	Office of Information & Technology	Gary Shaffer, Director, IT Asset Management Crystal Wiggins, Director, Employee/Labor Relations & HR Policy Development ✓ William Vargas, Information Technology Specialist Timothy Hughes, Program Analyst
Labor Relations	Ron Reynolds, AFGE, National Safety Representative ✓ Ronald Reynolds, NAGE, National Safety Representative <i>(Kathy Fiery, NAGE Representative, joined the meeting at 10:30 am on behalf of Ron Reynolds)</i> ✓ Jeff Shapiro, NFFE, Safety Representative LeRoy Bauer, SEIU, Divisional President Cathy Billiter, UAN, National Safety Representative		
VACO HR/Labor Management Relations (LMR)	Larry Bennett, HR Specialist		
Guests:	Gary Salyers, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Murfreesboro, TN		

Introduction: Deno Verenes, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, VA Central Office (VACO), called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Verenes stated that there are many pertinent topics that will be discussed during the meeting such as the FY 2009 Annual Report to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and VA Directive 7700, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

Approval of SSC Meeting Minutes: Frank Denny, Director, Office of OSH, asked committee members for approval of the June 23, 2009, minutes that were sent to the committee on July 20, 2009, for review and comment. Michael Rabdau, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS), Washington Liaison Officer, made a motion to approve the minutes. John Beatty, Director, Safety and Technical Services, VHA, seconded the motion; the minutes are approved as written. Mr. Denny conveyed that these minutes will be reviewed and signed by the Designated Agency Safety Health Official (DASHO) and will be made available on the VA safety webpage.

Announcements:

Quarterly DASHO Conference Call (July 21, 2009) – The July 21 DASHO Conference Call included information from Steve Spencer, State Farm Insurance Representative, who provided an overview for a holistic approach to a floor safety program. Mr. Spencer's presentation, Floor Safety Assurance Program, provided statistics on the cause of slips and falls from floors and addressed appropriate footwear and floor types. The interactive call had 54 lines activated and afforded time for questions from participants. The agenda along with questions and responses can be viewed at: <http://vaww1.va.gov/vasafety/page.cfm?pg=687>.

The next DASHO Call is scheduled for October 20, 2009. Proposed topics for this call include the Annual OSHA Report and FY 2009 SHARE Goals status.

Welcome Gary Salyers – Mr. Denny introduced Gary Salyers, VHA, Murfreesboro, TN, to the committee and stated that Mr. Salyers is on a 90-day detail to the Office of OSH. During Mr. Salyers detail he will provide assistance to Luann Jenkins, Program Analyst, Office of OSH, on the data and safety metrics and other pertinent projects.

Review and Discuss Assignments

VA Directive 7700, Occupational Safety and Health (Attachment) –

Assignment from June SSC Meeting: Administrations to submit a draft copy of their revised safety program policy to Ernise Benjamin, Management Analyst, Office of OSH, by close of business on August 18, 2009, for inclusion in documents that will be sent to the SSC for review prior to the August 25, 2009, meeting.

Discussion:

Mr. Denny informed the committee that draft copies of the policy were received from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), VHA, and VACO. National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provided the Office of OSH a hard copy of NCA Draft Handbook 7700. The document was too large to be transmitted electronically.

NCA - Ruth Grubb, Program Analyst, Office of OSH, conveyed that it is not clear whether the NCA Handbook is in alignment with NCA's existing Directive 7700, and would like to have further discussions with John Thios, Safety/Occupational Health Program Manager, NCA, before distribution. Mr. Denny cautioned the committee that handbooks are normally considered guidance for the implementation of directives and should not be considered the actual policy. Ms. Grubb informed Mr. Thios that she would like for him to review the NCA policy that is due to expire in September and recertify that it is current and correct and is in concert with VA Directive 7700, dated February 2009. Mr. Thios stated to the committee that once the draft Handbook gets published, it will be sent to all field sites to standardize procedures done in the field.

VBA - Beverly Young, VBA Facilities, Access & Administration, reported to the committee that changes to VBA's Directive have been incorporated into the draft VBA Directive. Ms. Young also reported that the draft Directive is extensive with many references. Ms. Grubb inquired about an area within the draft document that references VA Handbook 7700.1 and reminded the Committee that VA Handbook 7700.1 was rescinded with the publication of VA Directive 7700, dated February, 2009. Ms. Young indicated she will review this once more for clarity. Ms. Grubb also inquired about whether a VBA Handbook is being developed as well. Ms. Young conveyed that a VBA Handbook does need to be updated and has to be in accordance with the record keeping changes that were done a few years ago.

VACO - Gerald Winston, Office of Administration, Fire and Safety Officer, VA Central Office (VACO), provided a rough draft document of the safety directive for the VACO campus. VACO currently has no safety committee in place, however, weekly safety inspections are conducted on the VACO campus buildings. Incidents or accidents are reported to the safety officer through the OSHA 301 form and incidents are then investigated. Frequent unannounced inspections are also done. There is also a VACO safety mailbox. Safety management training is part of a presentation for new supervisors and personnel. Mr. Winston also reported that VHA Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 5 conducts an Annual Workplace Evaluation (AWE) for all buildings under the VACO campus. John Beatty, Director, Safety and Technical Services, VHA, expressed overall concerns with this process as it applies to VACO, i.e., VACO does not fall under VHA. Mr. Betty expressed particular interest in how VACO safety deficiencies identified by VHA inspectors conducted on behalf of VACO are addressed. VHA could be placed in a vulnerable position if deficiencies identified in abatement plans are not corrected. Mr. Winston reported that this is problematic because several buildings are owned by the General Services Administration (GSA). Other buildings are privately owned but do go by the National Fire Protection Association life safety code regulations and the international building codes. Mr. Denny stated that possibly this process could be elaborated more in the proposed VACO Directive. Marilyn Waggoner, CEOSH, VHA, inquired about the number of employees at VACO. Mr. Winston stated that there are about 2,000 employees in the VACO main building; he did not have the numbers for the remainder of the VACO campus. Ms. Waggoner suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a VACO Safety Committee due to the number of employees.

VHA - Ms. Waggoner informed the committee that the wrong policy was accidentally sent to the Office of OSH but has resent the correct policy. The name of the program office has changed to the Office of Safety Health and Environmental Emergency Management. A VHA Safety and Health Leadership Committee has been established at the Administration level and will be chaired by the Director of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management who will also serve as the Designated Safety and Health Official (DSHO) . The Safety and Health Leadership Committee will be responsible for providing reports periodically to the VA SSC.

OI&T - William Vargas, Information Technology Specialist, indicated that the Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) will need further assistance from VA Office of OSH in regards to establishing a safety policy.

VCS - Michael Rabdau, Washington Liaison Officer, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS), reported that VCS will plan to have a policy document in the future. Ms. Grubb asked if VCS had an existing safety policy or directive. Mr. Rabdau indicated he was not aware of one at the present time.

Ms. Grubb reminded the committee of the requirement identified in VA Directive 7700, which states "Each Administration or Other Key Official ensures review of each Administration's existing safety program policy, make revisions necessary to ensure compliance with VA Directive 7700, and submits a draft of their respective safety program policy to the SSC within six months of the issuance of VA Directive 7700. A copy of the final safety program policy will be submitted to the SSC within a year of the issuance of 7700." That would be February 11, 2010.

Mr. Denny stated that he would like an open discussion among committee members regarding the draft Directives that have been presented and recommended that each Administration review the draft documents and submit comments to the Office of OSH. The Office of OSH will consolidate responses and provide them to the committee prior to the October meeting.

Assignment: One person from each Administration to review each Directive and submit comments to Ernise Benjamin, Management Assistant, Office of OSH, by September 30.

➤ **Safety Strategic Plan Report Card (See Attachment) –**

Assignment from June SSC Meeting: Ms. Grubb to schedule a meeting with the SSC to specifically discuss the VA Safety Strategic Plan Report Card.

Discussion:

Ms. Grubb stated that the Safety Strategic Plan Report Card document that was sent out to the committee reflected discussions from the previous two live meetings that were held. Participants in the live meetings completed review of Goals 1 and 2 ending on page 9 of the Plan. Another live meeting will be scheduled in the near future to discuss the rest of the items within the document.

Assignment: Ms. Grubb to schedule a meeting with the SSC to specifically discuss the VA Safety Strategic Plan Report Card.

➤ **Report by Administration –**

NCA Assignment from June SSC Meeting: Mr. Thios will provide to committee members information gleaned from his attendance to a seminar on behavior-based studies. **Note:** Assignment deferred from June 23rd meeting due to the absence of Mr. Thios.

Discussion:

Mr. Thios reported that unfortunately he was not able to attend the seminar due to a project timeline he was working on but hopefully will attend at a later date and will bring back his findings to the committee. This assignment is now closed.

II. New Business

- **FY 2009 Annual Report to OSHA (Attachment provided)** – OSHA's request for Agency FY 2009 Annual Report cover memo and template for reporting were provided as attachments to the committee. Ms. Grubb strongly encouraged the committee to use the templates that were provided to them. A memorandum for Administrations is currently being drafted for Mr. Sepulveda's signature and will be dispatched through WebCIMS in the near future. The Office of OSH wanted to provide advance notice to those on committee who are responsible for completing the report.

Ms. Grubb addressed the six new items of information OSHA is requesting for FY 2009.

Ms. Waggoner asked if the six items were being requested by the DASHO or OSHA.

Ms. Grubb clarified that they were being requested by OSHA and are explained in the cover memo from OSHA.

Mr. Vernon Wilkes, Industrial Hygienist, VHA, inquired about the first new requirement "An example of self evaluation protocol the agency used in FY 09 to conduct self evaluation."

Mr. Wilkes asked if submitting an AWE would be appropriate for this. Ms. Waggoner suggested that the HAIG survey could also be used for this. Ms. Jenkins stated that the Administrations should decide amongst themselves what they deem is appropriate to submit.

Assignment: Each Administration to have their data completed and submitted on the OSHA provided template no later than November 13, 2009, the second week in November, if not sooner.

- **Safety Metrics (Attachment provided)** – Ms. Jenkins informed the committee that this data includes total case rate and lost time case rates for VA and all Administrations for 3rd Quarter, using the projected rate. Utilizing the projected rate data provides a projected rate, if the current trend continues as present. However, the trend line is based on the actual case rate. Total cases by VA have increased by 300. NCA was the only Administration that had decreased in both numbers and in rates. Dr. Hodgson inquired as to whether the rates were decreasing as a result of NCA contracting previously high injury rate positions.

John Thios, NCA, indicated that he had not broken the information out by that, but would look into it. Ms. Jenkins conveyed that often times, even contractors, if not specifically addressed in the contract when an injury occurs, may be covered under FECA. It was encouraged that WC and coverage be included in all contracts and specify that the contractor be covered by State WC.

III. General Discussion


➤ **Report by Administration:**

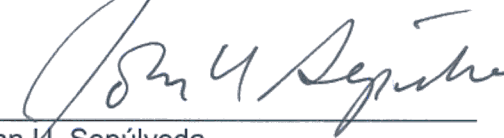
- ❖ **NCA** – Mr. Thios had nothing to report on behalf of NCA.
- ❖ **OI&T** – Mr. Vargas had nothing to report on behalf of OI&T.
- ❖ **VCS** – Mr. Rabdau had nothing to report on behalf of VCS.
- ❖ **VBA** – Ms. Young reported that VBA has instituted a monthly administration call that will contain safety information and data.
- ❖ **VHA** – Ms. Waggoner had nothing to report on behalf of VHA.
- ❖ **VACO** – Mr. Winston inquired about whether or not VA Handbook 7700.1 has been rescinded. Mr. Denny stated it has been rescinded and the committee did not feel there was a need for a handbook at this point.

IV. Adjournment/Next Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2009, at 9 a.m., in Conference Room 528.


Frank Denny
Director, Occupational Safety and Health


Deno Verenes
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Administration


John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for Human Resources
and Administration